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THE MASSACHUSETTS RIGHT TO READ EFFORT

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A PLAN FOR THE SEVENTH AND FINAL YEAR

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1979
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JOSEPH J. TREMONT

DIRECTOR

1979-1980

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INTRODUCTION

As in other states, the last year of the Right to Read Effort in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts will coincide with planning for the basic skills emphasis legislated to begin July 1, 1980. The overlapping tasks of the coming year - to wind down an old program and to think about a new one - allows us to demonstrate in this report a posture only educators would accept as physically possible: looking backwards and forwards simultaneously!

We will be trying to focus each section of this proposal so as to recommend for future carry-over the strategies which worked for us and our Local Educational Agencies (LEAs). We will also indicate the nationally mandated objectives and activities that proved disappointing or even obstructive to achieving our overall goals.

We intend as well to say something about the matrix of learning to read and reading to learn in this society. One of the major shortcomings of the National Right to Read Effort has been its mandated reluctance to deal with methodology. Unless the new program honestly confronts this matter and such variables as the personal characteristics of the learner and the classroom teacher, and the grounding of motivation or lack thereof in parental and societal support, the Basic Skills Movement will no more be able to combat illiteracy than was Right to Read. Non-threatening generalizations have had their day; the public is now clamoring for hard news, hard truth, and hard advice. In what follows we shall be speaking to this new public mandate.

* * *

I. Criteria of Excellence

As in past years, this plan for the seventh and final year of the Massachusetts Right to Read Effort will deal primarily with ten objectives. These ten objectives, which originate in the National Right to Read Office, derive their sense of urgency from a national commitment to full literacy.

Which of these ten objectives can I rate successful and which a conspicuous failure now, in this eleventh hour of the Massachusetts Right to Read Effort? In regard to the first one — setting of criteria of excellence — I am certain that we have more than realized this objective. The criteria of excellence, made manifest in the booklet, Focus on Excellence, has been since its inception a perennial success not only in Massachusetts but throughout the country as well.

The irreducible criteria set forth in Focus logically went on to generate a number of equally useful printed instruments which, like the parent publication, continue to be widely requested. The Needs Assessment Instrument had its diagnostic questions keyed to the criteria of excellence, and in due course, each of the five major goals set forth in Focus was developed into a more fully argued position paper of official endorsement by the Massachusetts Right to Read.

Most recently Focus came into use once more by a committee set up to develop a protocol to the end that exemplary reading programs could be identified, validated and recommended as models to other school systems in the Commonwealth.

However Focus, for all its success, suffers from the conscious and purposeful omission of any concrete information about learning to read and reading to learn as these are now commonly understood among reading specialists. In spite of apparent consensus concerning the basic stages of reading - readiness, decoding, and comprehension - the authors of Focus on Excellence chose to omit all this out of fear of appearing to recommend particular methodologies. In anticipation of a similar document for basic skills instruction being projected, I would like to revoice my objections at this time to avoiding helpful specificity whenever there is even a remote chance of disagreement.

An example of how difficulties intrinsic to the teaching and learning process tend to be unfortunately papered over by too unqualified an endorsement of a generally helpful booklet is Section B of Focus on "Organizing and Managing a Reading Program." Here a management paradigm stressing a hierarchy of skills - criterion-referenced tests, relevant instructional materials and conscientious record keeping - is urged upon the teacher. Quite rightly so. She cannot possibly teach everything simultaneously; she needs to know where her teaching has "taken" and where it has not; and she needs to leave for the child's next teacher a clear record of what he and she have accomplished together.

This is no more than common sense, and such reminders will always be useful in classrooms where confusion and problems of morale have crowded out common sense. However, what was left out in describing a systems approach was the amount of confusion and instructional insecurity actually caused by what was originally formulated as a remedy. The

moment a hierarchy of skills is proposed, professional haggling begins over each minute detail. Criterion-referenced tests can tend to dominate classroom activity to the detriment of teaching and reteaching. A similarly narrow conscientiousness in interpreting general directives can lead to a teacher's spending so much time sifting through various "keyed" materials in quest of the sure-fire technique and in keeping ever more exquisitely "objective" records that she has neither inclination nor time nor the necessary self-confidence to see that her students practice reading and writing and to stand behind (and over) them as they do so.

We very much hope that these sins of omission, i.e., heating up the public relations effect without noting the potential hazards, will not be repeated in the course of formulating criteria for excellence in basic skills programs.

* * *

II. Statewide Needs Assessment

The first statewide needs assessment in reading was completed in 1974, and the results disseminated in 1975. In 1975, the writing assessment was administered to a sample of 9 year olds and 17 year olds in Massachusetts schools and the results released in 1976. All of the items on the reading assessment and a majority of items on the writing assessment were public domain items released by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

The second assessment of reading took place in 1977. The findings

were published in professional and lay circles in this Commonwealth in the fall of 1978. This second assessment of the reading skills of 9 year olds and 17 year olds yielded essentially the same results as the 1974-1975 assessment: the 9 year olds read as well as or better than their counterparts in the nation as a whole; and the 17 year olds, while reading at the same level as their national counterparts, did not seem to be functioning at the level expected of Massachusetts high school students. The cause for this decline remains to be known, since the statewide assessment measured only the results, not causes. Meanwhile it is open season for finger-pointers to guess at why gains appear to be dissipated as the students proceed through the junior high and senior high school.

The writing assessment, which has yet to be administered a second time to a sample of 9 year olds and 17 year olds in Massachusetts, shows that Massachusetts students do not write as well as their counterparts elsewhere in the country. I have discussed in previous reports why I thought this was happening in Massachusetts. The interested reader is referred to these documents on file both in Washington and Massachusetts.

The Advisory Council for Statewide Assessments has called one meeting this fall to discuss their concern that school systems are not using the results of the statewide assessment as a springboard for revising teacher practices in reading in our 351 cities and towns. I insisted at this meeting that the findings of the assessments may have been too gross to point to specific reforms or additions to the inservice training of classroom teachers of reading. Moreover, I am troubled that many of the recommendations that were made by a panel of reading specialists in

Massachusetts on the second reading assessment did not follow necessarily from the results of the assessment, but instead were the goals that these reading specialists and their professional organizations have been calling for in Massachusetts over the last several years. I have no problems with these recommendations, indeed, I espouse some of them. What I quarrel about is that they may appear to the unwary reader as having been deduced logically from the assessment findings, which simply is not the case.

In regard to statewide assessments, generally, care needs to be taken to devise or use only those measures that do not hide students weaknesses in reading skill, but instead allow LEAs to use the results to upgrade their curricular endeavors.

* * *

III. Training Program for LEAs

There are now 100 active LEAs in Massachusetts formally affiliated with the Massachusetts Right to Read Effort. Two years ago, when 120 formal affiliates were asked to consider whether or not they wished to remain with Right to Read, twenty school systems decided to withdraw. Twenty other school systems have been asked over the years between 1973 and 1978 to drop out of the Effort; they had performed few if any of the activities that were part of the contractual agreement between the State Education Agency (SEA) and their respective school systems. Of the present 100 LEAs, then, I would speculate over half are superb Right to Read sites. The others have for one reason or another still not completed

the Right to Read process in terms of attaining the expected goals.

No new LEAs were recruited this year. The SEA decided that, all 351 cities and towns in Massachusetts having long since been invited to join Right to Read, it was time, during these declining years of Right to Read, to concentrate our limited resources on the 100 active affiliates. Therefore, all our work this year has been to provide advanced training to our "veteran" LEAs. The form of this training depends on the regional educational center that serves the particular LEA. In each regional office the technical advisor (a reading specialist with several advanced degrees, who is either retired from a full time reading position or is head of a reading department in our schools of education), determines with the group of LEAs what kind of training is required. The regions address problems endemic to their school systems as well as their region.

It has been impressed upon the 100 LEAs that this next year will be the last of Right to Read. They understand that if they wish to remain intact as a group in order to influence reading practices in Massachusetts they will have to provide their own leadership. Although it is not yet known how the federal legislation on basic skills will be combined with the Massachusetts Board of Education's policy on basic skills, it is fairly clear that we will no longer be able to oversee advanced training for these veteran LEAs. Indeed, it was never my idea to keep doing leadership training indefinitely. The Plan of Action for Massachusetts called only for one year of sustained training, because I assumed I would be moving on to other school systems. In practice I found veteran LEAs reluctant to be cut adrift, and I kept them together as a group.

Now, however, if they decide to remain together as a force to solve their respective problems in some collaborative manner, they will have to assume almost total responsibility for doing so.

As for the training offered in the six regional educational centers and the more advanced training for old-timers, I am satisfied that successive refinements over the years have made it as good as is humanly possible. At least in Massachusetts, when the final assessment of Right to Read is made, it will not be this objective that will be found wanting.

* * *

IV. Technical Assistance

Providing technical assistance has meant two things to this State Director: first, providing initial and advanced training to LEAs; and, second, giving technical assistance to non-Right to Read sites in the Commonwealth. Simple arithmetic suggests that, with 351 cities and towns in Massachusetts and only one director and one assistant to serve them, technical assistance would be "once over lightly" for non-Right to Read sites. Having said that, we hasten to add that we have never refused a request for help. This is what has made this job almost overwhelming and frequently frustrating.

What have we done and what have we learned? My log shows that we served this last year on ten standing committees, both in-house and with professional reading organizations; and we gave talks before 109 different groups in the Commonwealth, talks ranging from formal presentations

at professional conferences to in-service training sessions in Right to Read and non-Right to Read sites, and even radio and television shows. In the meantime, we tried to visit every regional educational center at least twice a year to monitor both the training of newly recruited Right to Read local directors and the advanced training of veteran LEA directors.

Eating, living and drinking work twenty-four hours a day, one only comes close to getting this kind of job done. There is just too much to do and not enough time, personnel or money to do it adequately. We have come to the conclusion that the goal mandated by the National Right to Read office was simply unrealistic if "coverage" of an entire state is implied. A better way to have tackled the problem of technical assistance was to have limited our responsibilities to Right to Read school systems. Once 100 formally affiliated Right to Read sites (about one fourth of the state) had received training and were actively involved in the Right to Read Effort, some mechanism should have existed for ending the formal affiliation and our supervisory responsibility. One can only provide very minimal services to old LEAs while inducting new sites into the Right to Read process. In retrospect, our best efforts may have been too dissipated through being too widely spread.

We also had a problem with the fact that we were the only reading specialist at the State Department of Education. So, although we were not de jure the state's reading director, all reading inquiries and requests eventually were given to us to handle. This is why we had to look at the objective of technical assistance as a two-pronged endeavor. We did the best job that we could under the circumstances, but are by no

means satisfied by our accomplishment. A similarly grandiose plan should be avoided when this state moves into basic skills in 1980. One person and his assistant simply cannot expect to accomplish the kind of work that the concerted wishful thinking of the best Washington brains is apt to expect of them. Between suffering terminal guilt over failing to accomplish the impossible and seeming to offer excuses by making recommendations for the new basic skills program, our choice was easy. We care too much about life and love and literacy to commit suicide now.

* * *

V. Statewide Advisory Council

The Statewide Advisory Council for the Right to Read Effort has been ably led by Mrs. Jean Slingerland for the past three years. Since this will be the last year of Right to Read, it is not clear just what they should do to insure an orderly transition from Right to Read to Basic Skills in Massachusetts. For example, a previous committee called the Committee on High School Graduation Requirements was recently renamed a Committee on Basic Skills. Now that the State Board of Education has fully endorsed the work of this committee, they will be disbanded and a new one will be formed for 1979 for a three year period to deal with the Basic Skills Movement in Massachusetts.

It is my contention that all existing Right to Read Councils, Basic Skills Committees, etc. should be merged into one comprehensive group.

Replication and duplication of tasks too common in past years could and should be avoided in the future. I would like to see Mrs. Slingerland play a role in this new committee. However, she might prefer not to, as she has been kept very busy for the last three years doing Right to Read work.

She played a major role in completing and disseminating the main task of the council, the 1979 booklet Getting Back to Reading. This year, on her own but with the research assistance of this office she wrote a most timely booklet on the Minimum Competency Movement. It is being distributed this month throughout the country. She has been pleased to collaborate with me on radio talk shows and continues to serve in setting up the necessary mechanism for reading, ranking and rating reading improvement project proposals. As a participating delegate to the Regional Basic Skills Conference held in Boston last November and the National Basic Skills Conference held in Washington last December, her thorough reports on and responses to these sessions were extremely helpful.

In sum, I consider this particular council to be a still-evolving success in terms of productiveness and the willingness of many members to continue their services in individual capacities even in a period when they are no longer needed to meet in monthly sessions. Their booklets have been warmly received by groups and individuals in Massachusetts; indeed the National Council of Teachers of English has promised to give one of them even wider circulation by reproducing it in their professional journals.

Finally, the convening of a new Advisory Council waits upon the decisions of the Commissioner and the State Board of Education. Between now and 1980 only planning sessions with other state level people are in view. In these sessions, Mrs. Slingerland will serve as transitional liaison when needed.

* * *

VI. State Education Task Force

Initially resistant last September to moving my statewide program to the boondocks, the Central Massachusetts Regional Educational Center, I am now delighted to stay here until July, 1980. A major reason for this change of heart is a notion that in this office I may be able to make good one of my conspicious failures. I refer to the obligation to build a State Education Task Force.

The sad story of my earlier attempts to combat such a task force's powerlessness, internecine skirmishes and the general resistance of State and federal programs in pooling expertise and resources at the regional level.

A promising start by my associates in this region preceded my move to West Boylston. There is a Curriculum and Instruction team made up of Title I, Title IV-C, Right to Read, Diffusion Network, Student Services, etc. More recently, another committee has begun to look at basic skills programs in terms of providing service to LEAs served by this regional office. These are the beginnings of an overall attempt to tie all the

regulatory, funding, general aid, technical assistance, information development and administrative planning into a single operational plan for the region. I am looking forward to using the basic skills as the glue in this newly coherent instructional thrust. If it works, a functional task force will indeed have been realized, in small if not in the grandiose form originally envisaged in the Right to Read guidelines.

* * *

VII. Certification

Along with the State Education Task Force, I consider my work on the Certification objective a second failure. In concert with the New England Consortium for the Right to Read Effort and the New England Reading Association, an attempt was made to specify the professional preparation of reading personnel but this document apparently had no impact in Massachusetts. It was widely circulated among reading people in this state, and I seem to recall more than a few reading specialists applauding our recommendations, but the document never reached its intended audience in this Commonwealth.

Within the last few weeks (March 1979), public meetings have been scheduled in the six regional educational centers to discuss new guidelines for certifying educational personnel. These eventually will be adopted in some form or another by the State Board of Education. I have the document before me as I write. The gist of the new requirements is

that educational personnel should be assessed by five standards. The first standard is that teachers be knowledgeable in their fields. The second standard deals with the ability of teachers to communicate with students. The third concerns itself with a prospective teacher's ability to develop approaches to instruction that facilitate learning. A fourth standard is the teacher's ability to evaluate the effectiveness of her instruction. And the fifth standard deals with the ability of the teacher to deal equitably and sensitively with students.

When I first began to peruse this document, initial confusion was experienced thanks to a thicket of codes and strictures. In due course I found that specifications for teachers of reading are spelled out for the various grade levels, and that the language arts are treated as one rather than being divided into separate subject-matter areas. This, too, represents much progress in our thinking in Massachusetts. While regretting that various reading specialist and administrative roles have not been spelled out by the committee that wrote the proposed regulations, I am generally happy with this initiative. No credit is due me for this progress. Indeed, I was not asked to sit on the committee.

I have tried to support the work on certification to be accomplished by the Association of College and University Reading Educators. MACURE has developed a questionnaire asking the LEAs in the 351 cities and towns in Massachusetts to describe the reading roles in their respective school systems. Thus we shall eventually know the different kinds of reading specialists and administrators in the Commonwealth.

* * *

VIII. Identification and Validation of Exemplary Reading Programs

Last March 3, 1978, I set up a committee on validation to shape the document prepared from Title IV-C Innovative Programs into a Right to Read protocol. The Title IV-C document, it should be noted, borrowed from the work of the Joint Dissemination Review Panel in Washington.

The Right to Read Committee, chaired by the very able Dr. Florence Mahon, Technical Advisor of the Southeast Regional Educational Center, met on six occasions with local Right to Read directors from Quabbin, Mansfield and Millbury.

In October they submitted their work to me and my immediate superior, Mr. Robert Watson, Director of the Bureau of Curriculum and Instruction. Having met twice to discuss their protocol, Mr. Watson sent a letter to Dr. Mahon approving her committee's work but making two suggestions: that the protocol be reduced in length and that three rather than two school systems pilot it. (We decided that we wanted the "kinks" ironed out in three distinctly different settings: a small school system, a moderate-sized school system and a large, urban school system.)

I have just now received word from Dr. Mahon that the committee will take the remainder of the year to pilot the validation process in the Spencer, Stoughton and Worcester Public Schools. This summer, 1979, LEAs in Massachusetts will be invited to submit their programs for scrutiny, and a team of three Right to Read directors will be sent to those who accept the invitation. The committee hopes to complete its work by June, 1980, just in time to round out the Massachusetts Right to

Read Effort.

As previous reports have detailed the difficulties attendant upon validating and exporting exemplary reading programs, there is no need to repeat them here. Last year I would have had to rate our fulfillment of this particular objective a failure. Today, I can report that Dr. Mahon, Rebecca Center, Edith Morgan and Dolores Neely promise to pull us into satisfactory compliance in the very nick of time. Very much a potential success at this writing, I feel confident that this objective will be considered successfully attained by Right to Read's deadline, June 1980.

* * *

IX. Dissemination

As earlier indicated, in this past year I have, alone or with others, participated in 109 separate speaking engagements in various places and before various audiences.

Another time-consuming but important task I am fortunately spared in this West Boylston location is dealing every day with people in Boston who would walk in off the street looking for help in reading. I am now in such a remote area of central Massachusetts that finding me requires a compass, a map, and a seeing eye dog. No good for illiterates. Nor do we any longer have to find referrals for the three-to five daily telephone callers seeking appropriate help. These callers are now given the toll-free number of a hotline which has been set up collaboratively

by the Adult Basic Education Bureau and the Massachusetts Literacy Volunteers.

Under the auspices of Right to Read in Massachusetts we have developed 17 major publications. These have been distributed throughout the country. They have brought us a great deal of publicity along with requests for more. We have been very fortunate in receiving considerable local publicity this year, which continues to enhance the reputation of the Massachusetts Right to Read Effort. In the last several months we have been cited in the Boston Magazine and the Boston Herald American. I have been interviewed by the Real Paper (formerly an "underground" Boston newspaper but recently more establishment-minded) for a piece on illiteracy to be published in mid-February.

I have indicated in many previous reports to Washington my reluctance to have Right to Read provide spicy copy for the Massachusetts media. I have resisted the attempts of public relations and media people to reduce the Right to Read message to the least common denominator of popular appeal and acceptance. When, for instance, the Westinghouse Broadcasting System was doing a series on basic skills in Massachusetts last September, I was as persistent as the television interviewer in declining to water down my responses. With an eye to being asked back by New England's largest television station, it is tempting to sacrifice judiciousness of response to an interviewer's preference for punchy and sensational one-liners. In the long run, however, I am sure it is better to prefer informing the public to entertaining or confusing them. In any case, having consciously sought to broadcast over the air, in print, and

and in oral presentations an honest appreciation of the difficulties inherent in our present educational objectives and our efforts to meet them, I am not displeased by our achievements in dissemination.

* * *

X. Evaluation

I have totally revamped the evaluation design for this year (1978-1979) and next (1979-1980). I will award the contract to one of three outside, independent evaluating agencies which submits the best proposal for what I have in mind. But before I describe what I envision for these penultimate and final evaluations, a look at the history of outside evaluations in this state in regard to Right to Read is in order.

When I first came aboard in 1973 I was appalled that the New England Consortium for the Right to Read Effort had not contracted with an outside agency to set up the evaluation design before the project began. I had been taught as a graduate student that the design should always precede the execution of a project and not be ex post facto except in unusual circumstances. These did not apply in this case. The project began in July, 1973, and I assumed my duties as State Director in October, 1973. I decided then and there never to make this mistake on my own. Thus, I have always signed a contract with a new outside evaluating agency in July or August before Massachusetts Right to Read activities have begun, as they always have, in September of the new contract year. It was my intention to resist the pressure of other

members of the former New England Consortium to publish reading test results in Right to Read sites in New England. It was my contention that these test results would not show gains due to the Right to Read process for some time to come, if indeed they ever did.

A review of my graduate school research on written composition supported my conviction that when the data for evaluation is collected prematurely little or no gains may be demonstrated. From this body of research on composition, I concluded that we needed more time in Right to Read to measure what we were collectively doing. And, when Massachusetts dropped out of the New England Consortium, I continued to follow the dictate that primary goals should be assessed before ultimate goals. Hence, I reasoned that we should look to what we were doing, or not doing (at the state level) and assess that before we moved on to the intermediate goals of finding out and assessing what the locally designated Right to Read director was doing, or failing to do, when he or she returned home and tried to apply the Right to Read process to motivate teachers to teach reading better.

It was my intention to look last of all at what the students were doing, or not doing in reading in Right to Read sites and to compare them to students in non-Right to Read sites during the last year of the Right to Read Effort in Massachusetts. (For a fuller treatment of these past evaluations the readers can refer to earlier reports on file in this and the National Right to Read office.)

Last year's evaluation, an attempt to begin to find out what local Right to Read Directors did upon returning home to their respective

school systems was not very illuminating, although the problem was not with the evaluators. Many reasons, both positive and negative, were given; but I found myself hard put to know how I, in my administrative and advisory capacity, could rectify them. They seemed to be local issues, and although our training offered warnings to local directors about them and also offered strategies for dealing with them on-site, there seemed to be little carryover from training to application. The reasons for this failure had more to do with the human imperfections or shortcomings of the directors and their administrators, parents, teachers and students than with the technical advisors and their training program or, indeed, with me.

Following the evaluation, I decided to scuttle my original plan to evaluate student achievement in Right to Read sites and concentrate instead on what I had done or failed to do as Director of Right to Read. Surely, it seemed to me, what I had control over should be evaluated, not what someone else controlled or was responsible for. Consequently, I drafted a paper outlining a qualitative evaluation of the sixth and seventh years of the Massachusetts Right to Read Effort. To be avoided is the kind of statistical study that results typically in several global statements, three positive findings, three negative findings and three recommendations. Instead, through candid interviews with a comprehensive sample of a cast of characters (my superiors, the technical advisors, per diem consultants, representatives of the professional organizations, parents, members of the press and radio and television personalities, local reading directors, local administrators,

etc.), I hope to receive an account of where and how the state leadership program succeeded or failed in its obligation to initiate the Right to Read process. Finding out what part LEAs individually or even as a group played in the business of creating literate students is beyond our budgetary competence. After all, $50,000 to $100,000 in annual grants can take you only so far in measuring let alone reaching extremely idealistic goals.

So far as my attempt to elicit honest assessments rather than pro forma turgid testimonials is a sincere one (and it is), it may be that the evaluation objective will deserve an A. At least I am purposely attracting criticism to where there is a reasonable expectation of subsequent change for the better - myself. As for determining the extent to which the Plan of Action significantly reduced statistical illiteracy, this was and remains an unrealistic evaluation objective when one remembers what an underfinanced, low-priority item the National Right to Read Effort was (and is) in our society.

* * *

Conclusion

Of the ten objectives listed in the Table of Contents, it should be noted by my readers that six I have rated as definite successes and two - the State Education Task Force and Certification - as definite failures. I rated Technical Assistance as a failure in one sense but a success in the other. The potential success of Identification and

Validation of Exemplary Reading Programs will, I trust, be confirmed by June, 1980.

How do I feel about this mixed bag of successes and failures? Where the success or failure has most largely depended on my own standards of responsibility and hard work, I feel good. I have given this job all I had and struggled to find more. Where success or failure involved to a considerable extent reliance on others, it is as tough to accept failure as it was to live with varying degrees of incompetence or lack of concern on the part of some of my colleagues. Circumstances often require that you depend on some people whose known track record is poor and who have no compunction about comfortably reducing your record to their own level. The best one can do, while tenure and longevity keep them in our midst, is to try to reform those whose attitudes are not set in concrete. Where change is possible, one always tries to soften the effect of granite obstruction. (As a last recourse, one simply leaves the statuary to the pigeons.)

Setting aside the specific objectives of this program and thinking in general about nearly a decade of legislated war on illiteracy, I am led to some troubling speculations about the actual fruit of many good intentions. A pupil's success or failure has become increasingly dependent upon an army of adjunct tutors who intrude between him and his classroom teacher; reading specialists (and as a result of the Basic Skills Movement to be joined shortly, no doubt, by writing, speaking, and listening experts), guidance counselors, psychologists, aides,

interns, and so on. What, one wonders, might be achieved in basic skills if all these majors, colonels, and generals become frontline sergeants once more, but this time with only ten or twelve children as their sole but inalienable classroom responsibility. Offering such a job without alternatives would at least nicely sort out those who use teaching in the classroom as a mere way station on route to positions of "higher" status.

I am also distressed by the present state of the specialty of reading, which was born with such promise less than a century ago. Increasingly discrete and precious research projects have proliferated. Meanwhile, any solid theoretical base on which to pin all these studies becomes harder and harder to discern. The assumption encouraged by all this disparate research is that our children are being taught more by better teachers, better schools, better materials. It has been and continues to be a dangerous assumption. Among other evil effects it encourages decresent teaching, delinquent parenting, and deficient learning.

Continuing to ruminate on the state of formal schooling in our society, I am increasingly concerned with the penchant of the schools for trying to be all things to all people. Did it never occur to those who would add all kinds of social goals to the curriculum that the time might come when we would be hard put to deal in any significant sense with the three R's? Although driver education, school breakfast and lunch programs, sex education, drug education, moral education are all

tremendously important, they should not be assumed as particular responsibilities of the schools simply because they are ignored or poorly handled by other social institutions such as the home and the church. If we continue to add on to the school curriculum, we soon will have to set up another agency outside the school to do what the schools used to be uniquely fitted to do: teach reading, writing and arithmetic.

On dark days I indulge my fantasies about blowing away the entire educational superstructure and, should I escape the resultant storm with mind and body intact, teaching the surviving children the alphabet with one finger in the settling dust. On fair days remembering the good things going on in some Massachusetts schools, and the youngsters who persist in learning, despite this ubiquitous superstructure, hope suggests another and less dramatic course of action. Maybe, if it turns out that there are no workable, national solutions to illiteracy, there may be regional, community, familial or even individual ones. And that, ultimately, should be the major quest of any Basic Skills Movement in this fair Commonwealth in the years ahead: to look for solutions to the illiteracy problem which perhaps have always been available closer to home.

* * *

VITA

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The Logos Honor Society

PUBLICATIONS:

LEARNING TO READ: THE GREAT DEBATE (1967)
(Assisted in the final stages of Dr. Jeanne Chall's revolutionary book.)

CLOZE PROCEDURE AS AN EDUCATIONAL TOOL (1968)

THE RIGHT TO READ: A CASE STUDY (In Press)

Wrote 17 major publications under the aegis of the Massachusetts Right to Read Effort.